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Insight Bulletin

For People Who Want to Know

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JULY 2025



MALAWI AT 61:

A DEMOCRACY IN DECLINE OR REBIRTH?

SUGAR CRISIS EXPOSES MALAWI'S MARKET

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Editorial

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THE FIRE WE CARRY



Sixty-one years ago, on a brisk July morning, Malawi stepped into the promise of freedom.

Flags were raised. Hopes soared. The colonizer's shadow had been lifted – or so it seemed. We told ourselves, “This is the beginning of something new.” And for a while, it was.

BUT WHAT HAS THAT FREEDOM REALLY MEANT FOR US?

In 2025, we are no longer staring

down colonial rifles – but we are dodging machetes in our own streets. The institutions we inherited were supposed to serve the people, yet too often they are weaponized against dissent. The panga-wielding gangs disrupting demonstrations today may not wear uniforms, but the silence – or complicity – of those in power speaks volumes.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Freedom, we were told, was about the right to vote. But what does voting mean in a climate of fear? Freedom was about self-rule. But what kind of rule brutalizes its own children for demanding better? Independence was supposed to be the foundation of a just society. Yet at 61, we seem more familiar with instability than with justice.

The burning buildings, broken bones, and battered voices of this July are not simply unfortunate events. They are symptoms. Symptoms of a nation that is still struggling to reconcile its founding dream with its current reality. We have created a tradition of celebration – parades, speeches, photo ops. But beneath the fireworks and flags, a different fire is burning: the fire of disillusionment, of growing youth unrest, of questions that

demand answers.

Still, this is not a eulogy.

It is a reckoning.

We believe this July issue must hold space for the uncomfortable questions: Who benefits from the chaos? Why is innovation celebrated in academic halls while beaten in the streets? How free is a nation where accountability is feared, and silence is rewarded?

Yet even as the smoke thickens, we see sparks of something else – resistance. Organizers, students, health innovators, everyday Malawians who still believe that this country can be better. This is the fire we must carry forward – not to destroy, but to illuminate. To ignite a vision of freedom that is not just ceremonial, but structural. Not just historic, but ongoing.

This month, as we mark 61 years of independence, let us not only remember how far we've come, but ask – **what have we actually become?**

The pages that follow are filled with courage, contradiction, and clarity. This is your Insight.

- Managing Editor

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MALAWI AT 61: A DEMOCRACY IN DECLINE OR REBIRTH?

By Osman Bwanali

On July 6, 1964, Malawi broke free from colonial rule with a promise that stirred the hearts of its people. Independence brought joy and hope to a young nation eager to chart its own destiny. Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, hailed as the Father of the Nation, stood before jubilant crowds promising unity, dignity, and development.

But the ideals of freedom were short-lived. Within a year, the 1964 Cabinet Crisis exposed deep cracks in the political fabric. Critics were exiled, dissent silenced, and by the 1970s, Banda had declared himself “President for Life.” The dream of democracy was buried under authoritarian rule, and Malawi sank into a culture of fear and control.

Three decades later, Malawians reclaimed that dream. In 1993, a

national referendum ended one-party rule, paving the way for multiparty democracy. Bakili Muluzi’s 1994 victory ushered in new freedoms – of speech, of the press, of association. For a brief moment, the power truly belonged to the people.

But the momentum was fleeting. Corruption crept in, and the constitution became a political playbook. Successive governments – from Bingu wa Mutharika to Joyce Banda, Peter Mutharika, and now Lazarus Chakwera – have all struggled to deliver on the promise of transparent, accountable governance.

Today, as Malawi marks 61 years of independence, it stands again at a critical crossroads. The excitement surrounding the 2020 court-ordered fresh elections, once hailed globally as a triumph of judicial independence, has faded. The Tonse Alliance,

elected on a platform of reform and hope, now faces growing criticism over broken promises, economic hardship, and eroding public trust.

Institutions once seen as bulwarks of democracy – such as the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the judiciary, and the media – are under increasing strain. Civil society is frustrated, journalists face harassment, and whistleblowers are ignored. A quiet climate of intimidation is settling in – not through brute dictatorship, but through the slow erosion of accountability and public confidence.

This democratic backslide is being worsened by a resurgence of political violence. With the 2025 elections looming, politically aligned gangs – often referred to as zikwanje or “panga guys” – are reappearing, attacking critics and disrupting peaceful gatherings. Their impunity sends a chilling message: violence

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Palestinian children search for belongings in the ruins of their home following Israeli airstrikes

A CALL FOR JUSTICE AND HUMANITY: STANDING WITH THE OPPRESSED

By Haroon Mia

As conflict intensifies in the Middle East, the world is witnessing a humanitarian crisis that transcends borders, religions, and politics. The ongoing violence in Gaza, compounded by escalating tensions between Israel and Iran, has left countless civilians – men, women, and children – caught in the crossfire. These are not just statistics; they are human lives, each with dreams, families, and the right to live in peace.

A WORSENING HUMANITARIAN TRAGEDY

Recent reports from Gaza paint a harrowing picture. On June 17, at least 70 Palestinians were killed while trying to collect food from aid distribution points – sites that should

be sanctuaries, not death traps. These attacks, carried out by Israeli forces, are part of a broader pattern of aggression that has devastated communities and crippled access to basic necessities.

Entire neighborhoods in northern Gaza have been reduced to rubble. Hospitals have run out of medicine, fuel, and electricity. Civilians have been displaced multiple times – fleeing south, then north, then south again – as military operations intensify without warning. The humanitarian infrastructure, once fragile, has now collapsed.

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, now operating under Israeli and U.S. oversight, has become a symbol of how humanitarian aid can be

politicized and weaponized. Rather than serving as a lifeline, aid has become entangled in negotiations, conditions, and blockades. Children are dying not just from bombs, but from hunger and dehydration.

REGIONAL ESCALATION, GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

Meanwhile, the conflict with Iran has escalated into a dangerous regional confrontation. Israeli airstrikes on Iranian targets, and retaliatory attacks from Tehran – including the April missile barrage – have brought the region to the brink of open war. Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq have also been drawn into the fray, each facing the consequences of a conflict not of their choosing.

Yet, amid this geopolitical chess

game, it is ordinary people – regardless of nationality or faith – who suffer the most. Whether in Tehran, Tel Aviv, or Gaza, the human cost is staggering. Families mourn in silence. Children grow up with trauma in place of childhood. The suffering is not ideological; it is human.

THE ROLE OF SUPERPOWERS

The role of the United States in this crisis cannot be ignored. As Israel's closest ally, the U.S. continues to provide military support and diplomatic cover, even as international outcry grows. Over \$14 billion in military aid was approved this year alone. The American veto in the UN Security Council has repeatedly blocked resolutions calling for ceasefires and humanitarian access.

This unwavering support emboldens actions that many around the world view as violations of international law and basic human rights. The silence – or complicity – of powerful nations sends a dangerous message: that might is right, and justice is negotiable.

AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE: MALAWI'S MOMENT

Here in Malawi, local solidarity efforts have begun to rise. Interfaith vigils have been held in Blantyre and Lilongwe. University students have organized peaceful rallies and boycotts. Civil society organizations

are calling on the government to adopt a foreign policy rooted in human rights, not geopolitical alliances.

This is not about taking sides in a political conflict. It is about affirming our shared humanity. It is about saying that no child should die of hunger or be bombed while seeking food. It is about demanding accountability from those in power and urging our leaders to align foreign policy with the principles of justice and truth.

As Africans, we know what colonization looks like. We know the sting of being silenced, of being told that our pain does not matter. The struggle of the Palestinian people resonates with our own histories. To ignore their cries is to betray our own past.

THE MORAL IMPERATIVE

Let us raise our voices – not as members of any one faith or group, but as people of conscience. Let us support humanitarian efforts, advocate for peace, and educate ourselves and others about the realities of this crisis. Let us challenge narratives that erase the suffering of one side while amplifying the pain of another.

Silence in the face of injustice is complicity. Neutrality, in moments of moral clarity, is a luxury the oppressed cannot afford. Now is

the time to stand up – not just for Palestinians or Iranians, but for all who suffer under the weight of war and oppression.

A PROPHETIC REMINDER

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught us a principle that transcends time and context:

SAHIH MUSLIM (HADITH 2578):

“Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or he is oppressed.”

The companions asked, “O Messenger of Allah, we help the oppressed, but how do we help the oppressor?”

He replied, “By preventing him from oppressing others.”

This is the balance we must seek. Stand with the oppressed. Hold the oppressor accountable – not with hatred, but with courage and conviction.

LET THIS BE OUR STAND

From Gaza to Malawi, from the halls of power to the quiet voices on the street, let us remember: justice is not a slogan. It is a commitment. Peace is not the absence of war. It is the presence of dignity. And our silence – if we choose it – will be remembered not as neutrality, but as betrayal.

We still have a choice. Let us make it count.



Humanitarian aid delayed at Gaza border – relief turned into red tape

<<FROM PAGE 6

Malawi at 61: A Democracy in Decline or Rebirth?



Security forces stand by during attacks on protesters – raising questions of complicity and impunity

is once again being normalized as a political tactic. It is a dangerous reversal that threatens to undo the hard-won gains of Malawi's multiparty era.

So, as parades fill the streets and speeches mark this year's

Independence Day, a deeper question lingers in the minds of many Malawians: what exactly are we celebrating? The symbols remain – the flag, the anthem, the presidential address – but the substance feels fragile. The danger is no longer

open tyranny, but quiet resignation. Voter apathy is growing. The youth are losing faith. Democracy, if not vigilantly defended, risks simply fading away.

Yet hope endures. Malawi's citizens have reclaimed their power before – through the 1993 referendum, the 2011 protests, and the 2020 constitutional court ruling. That spirit of resistance and resilience still burns, however dimly.

Independence was never meant to be the end of the journey – it was the beginning. Today, the flame of democracy flickers. Whether it is rekindled or extinguished depends not just on politicians, but on all of us. It depends on citizens who still believe in the ideals of July 6, 1964, and who are ready, once again, to rise.



Young minds showcase health innovations designed to solve Malawi's toughest medical challenges

MLW CALLS FOR SUPPORT FOR YOUNG INNOVATORS IN MALAWI

By Edward Rex

Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Research Programme (MLW) Director, Professor

Henry Mwandumba, has emphasized the need to support young innovators in the country by creating a platform where their ideas can generate tangible solutions within the health system.

The Director made the remarks on Wednesday, 2 July 2025, in Blantyre during the opening of this year's Innovation Week.

The event attracted professionals from health research, academia, government, industry, and civil society, who gathered to explore bold and collaborative approaches that are reshaping health systems and outcomes in Malawi.

Professor Mwandumba acknowledged the high level of talent that young people in the country possess, highlighting that Innovation Week is a viable platform where they can present their ideas and connect

with key individuals in the field.

"This is actually a very exciting year for us. This is the second Innovation Week that we have hosted. It builds on the successes of last year.

Malawi is rich in terms of talent, and you will be amazed by what will come out of this meeting – the level of talent that is available. We have young and talented innovators. What we need to do is support them and move their ideas forward.

As MLW, we want to do this by offering services through our Innovation Hub, which will help catalyze people's ideas and link them with the appropriate industries and expertise," Professor Mwandumba explained.

On his part, Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHS) Executive Dean for the School of Life Sciences and Health Professions, Arox Kamng'ona, called for collaboration among various stakeholders to make innovation more impactful in Malawi's health system.

"More often than not, as researchers, our work is embedded in journals, and the impact of what we do does not trickle down to the communities that need help the most.

My emphasis is that for us to bridge that gap, we need collaboration among all key players, including researchers, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and others," Kamng'ona said.

Biomedical engineer from Makerere University in Uganda, Robert Ssikitoleko, noted that despite existing challenges, African countries are making significant progress in embracing health innovations. However, he was quick to call for harmonization between innovation activities and regulatory frameworks to produce the desired impact.

This year's Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Research Programme (MLW) Innovation Week was held under the theme "Transforming Health through Innovation."

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SUGAR CRISIS EXPOSES MALAWI'S MARKET FRAGILITY

By Mustafa Makumba

For many Malawians, sugar has long been a kitchen staple – reliable, unremarkable, and affordable. But in recent months, this everyday essential has become a symbol of deeper economic dysfunction, as soaring prices and chronic shortages grip the nation.

Despite a government-sanctioned retail price of K3,000 per kilogram, sugar – when available at all – now sells for as much as K6,000. The spike has hit households and small businesses alike, triggering public outrage and prompting urgent intervention.

A PERFECT STORM OF SUPPLY CHAIN FAILURES

The crisis finds its roots in a series of cascading disruptions at Illovo Sugar Malawi's Nchalo and Dwangwa estates. Unseasonal and prolonged rains delayed the start of the crushing season, reducing output just as demand spiked with the onset of the cooler months. Illovo, which controls nearly the entire domestic sugar market, holds a monopoly so central that any disruption reverberates nationwide.

Making matters worse is the rampant smuggling of sugar across Malawi's porous borders. A significant portion of stock intended for local shelves is being trafficked into neighbouring countries through informal routes. Earlier this month, Trade Minister Vitumbiko Mumba confirmed the arrest of smugglers caught with over 300 bales of sugar – evidence of a



Sugar, once a source of national pride for Malawi, has now become one of the scarcest commodities in the country

growing black market draining the national supply.

HOUSEHOLDS AND BUSINESSES UNDER PRESSURE

The human cost of the crisis is immediate and personal. "At K5,000 per kilogram, it's beyond my means," said Patricia Mbewe, a mother of three from Lilongwe. "I used to bake for my children – now even tea with sugar feels like a luxury."

Small-scale entrepreneurs are also feeling the sting. In Blantyre's Mbayani township, Kelvin Nyondo, who runs a modest bakery, has been forced to halve production. "Customers complain, but what choice do I have? Either I buy at these prices or I shut down," he said.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE?

In response to public outcry, Minister Mumba announced a temporary ban on sugar exports and authorized law enforcement to clamp down on

smugglers and price gouging. Illovo has resumed full operations and begun importing 600 tonnes of sugar from Zambia to help stabilise the market.

However, these measures have yet to fully restore normalcy. Prices remain stubbornly high, and availability remains patchy.

MORE THAN JUST SUGAR

Economists warn that this crisis is not isolated. With food inflation already exceeding 36 percent, the sugar shock is merely a preview of broader vulnerabilities. If unchecked, similar crises could erupt in other essential sectors.

For now, Malawi's sugar shortage is more than just a supply glitch – it's a bitter reminder of how fragile the country's economic systems remain in the face of climate shocks, policy gaps, and unregulated trade.



Members of the Association of Muslim Journalists (AMUJO) pose for a group photo after a successful AGM in Blantyre, united under the call for ethical journalism and peaceful civic engagement

MIA CALLS FOR ETHICAL JOURNALISM AHEAD OF GENERAL ELECTIONS

By Edward Rex

With Malawi's Tripartite Elections just months away, conversations around media responsibility are intensifying – and at the heart of it, a call for journalism that informs, unites, and maintains national peace.

This message took center stage at the 2025 Annual General Meeting of the **Association of Muslim Journalists (AMUJO)**, held on June 14 at Malawi Sun Hotel in Blantyre. The event brought together media professionals from across the country to reflect on their ethical obligations in shaping public opinion during an election year.

Speaking as Guest of Honour, Minister of Water and Sanitation **Hon. Abida Mia** urged journalists to anchor their work in professionalism, truth, and fairness. She emphasized that the press holds enormous influence – especially during elections – and that responsibility must be handled with integrity.

"The media can either ignite or extinguish the flames of division,"

she said. "Let your reporting be factual, fair, and balanced. Avoid sensationalism. Promote tolerance and peaceful discourse. That is responsible journalism – and ethical journalism."

While Mia's remarks acknowledged the unique voice of faith-based media, her message was universal: journalism, regardless of background or belief, must serve the public interest – not partisan agendas.

The event was held under the theme "**Promoting Peaceful Co-existence Through Ethical Journalism**," a message echoed by AMUJO President **Chekaukutu Ndege**, who called on members to uphold the highest standards of the profession.

"We are guided by both professional ethics and the moral compass of our faith," Ndege said. "When we report truthfully and respectfully, we contribute to a more informed, united, and peaceful society."

However, Ndege also voiced concern about the association's limited resources, which have restricted AMUJO's ability to hold trainings, campaigns, and member


development programs.

"Our visibility and capacity to retain talent suffer when funding is scarce. We need collective vision and action to grow stronger," he noted.

The keynote speech, delivered by Dr. Sufian Rasheed from the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences (MUBAS), focused on core journalistic values – accuracy, fairness, independence, and respect for the public. He encouraged journalists to recommit to those standards, especially during times of national tension.

Beyond the speeches, members used the gathering to review parts of the association's constitution, exchange ideas, and envision the future of AMUJO – which first gained public visibility during its 2021 symposium in Blantyre.

As the 2025 elections approach, one theme echoed throughout the day: the pen remains one of the most powerful tools in shaping peace or conflict – and journalists must choose their words wisely.



Takaful
Islamic

Faith in the Fire: Sustaining Livelihoods Amid Price Hikes

Malawians are no strangers to hardship – but July 2025 feels especially heavy. As inflation continues to erode the value of every Kwacha. A loaf of bread that cost K1,500 last year now sells for over K2,900. Electricity units vanish quicker, market prices spike weekly, and transport costs have doubled. Yet, for many, **salaries remain unchanged.**

This is not just economic strain – it is survival pressure.

But even in this pressure, faith offers guidance. Islamic financial principles speak deeply to such moments, reminding us that wealth is a trust (*amanah*) and that resilience is built not only through money – but through values like moderation, justice, and collective care.

LIVING WITH LESS: ISLAMIC GUIDANCE ON BARAKAH

In Islamic teachings, the concept of **barakah** – divine blessing in sustenance – is central. It is not always about having more, but about **making what you have go further.**

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

“Riches are not from an abundance of

worldly goods, but from a contented heart.” (Sahih Bukhari)

In practical terms, barakah means cutting unnecessary expenses, prioritizing needs over wants, and avoiding debt wherever possible. It also means recognizing that how we **earn** and **spend** matters. Ethical income – halal, clean, and honest – brings peace, even when little. Wasteful or dishonest gain, however large, brings anxiety.

STRETCHING THE KWACHA: PRACTICAL ISLAMIC TOOLS

One powerful tool is **budgeting through intention (niyyah)**. Spend deliberately. Track every Kwacha. Make family decisions together. Shift from impulse spending to planned survival. Even Sadaqah, when given with sincerity – even if just K1,000 – invites barakah into the home.

Avoid debt unless necessary. Islam warns about the heavy burden of unnecessary borrowing, especially interest-based loans (*riba*). If you must borrow, seek **Qard Hasan** – an interest-free loan, often found within family, friends, or Islamic microfinance circles.

For those with enough, now is a time to give – not only Zakat but also **small acts of Sadaqah**. Sharing a meal,

covering a neighbor's transport fare, or helping a struggling small trader is more than charity – it's economic resistance against social collapse.

COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS: BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL

While personal responsibility is key, systemic answers are needed too. Faith leaders, mosques, and Islamic organizations must promote **rotating savings groups (chamas), food cooperatives, and zakat funds** to protect the most vulnerable. When a crisis becomes communal, so must the solution.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) once said:

“The best of people are those who are most beneficial to others.” (Daraqutni)

Let this moment call us to that benefit – not just with money, but with wisdom, sharing, and simplicity.

Malawi is hurting. But faith teaches us that hardship is not permanent, and neither is poverty shameful. What matters is how we respond – with dignity, discipline, and solidarity.

In the fire of economic strain, may we find not just struggle, but strength – and the kind of faith that carries us through.



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